

Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-10

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TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
USINT DAMASCUS PRIORITY
USINT BAGHDAD PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

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TOSEC 663 - ZFF JERUSALEM & DAMASCUS ONLY

MO. 11652:GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, XF, IS, LB
SUBJECT: INR COMMENT ON MA'ALOT AFFAIR

1. ASIDE FROM THE CONTINUING FEDAYEEN EFFORT TO SABOTAGE
GOLAN DISENGAGEMENT AND GENEVA TALKS, AFFAIR APPEARS TO
HAVE HAD SEVERAL UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS. ALTHOUGH YOU
ARE OBVIOUSLY IN A BETTER POSITION TO EVALUATE ITS IMPACT,

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FOLLOWING BACKGROUND MAY BE RELEVANT.

2. FROM REUTERS REPORT FROM TEL AVIV ABOUT LEAFLETS SCATTERED AT SCENE AND REUTERS REPORT FROM DAMASCUS ABOUT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED IN SYRIA, PDF (POPULAR DEMOCRATIC FRONT FOR LIBERATION OF PALESTINE) IS ONLY FEDAYEEN ORGANIZATION TO HAVE CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR MA'ALOT OPERATION. PDF, WHICH BROKE OFF FROM PFLP IN 1969, HAS BEEN REGARDED AS MORE IDEOLOGICAL THAN ACTION-ORIENTED, PROPAGATING A MARXIST-TINGED VERSION OF ARAB NATIONALISM AND MAINTAINING EXTREMELY CLOSE RELATIONS WITH SOVIET OFFICIALS, PARTICULARLY THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN BEIRUT (THOUGH MOSCOW IS HARDLY LIKELY TO MANAGE ITS OPERATIONS). BY VIRTUE OF A FAIRLY EFFICIENT CELLULAR ORGANIZATION, WHICH MAY BORROW FROM LENINIST PRECEDENT, PDF HAS HAD MORE SUCCESS IN ESTABLISHING A POLITICAL FOOTHOLD IN WEST BANK THAN ANY OTHER BEIRUT-BASED FEDAYEEN ORGANIZATION. PDF HAS CARRIED OUT NO PREVIOUS TERRORIST OPERATIONS TO OUR

KNOWLEDGE, BUT S/CCT FILES CONTAIN RECENT INTELLIGENCE OF PDF PROGRAM TO DEVELOP TERRORIST CAPABILITY IN ISRAEL.

3. EVIDENCE AT HAND IS INSUFFICIENT TO DETERMINE WHETHER: A) MA'ALOT SCHOOL WAS TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY FOR A TERRORIST TEAM WHICH ALSO MADE THE ATTACK ON AN ISRAELI HOME; OR B) IF THAT ATTACK WAS CARRIED OUT BY ANOTHER FEDAYEEN TEAM, BY COINCIDENCE OR FOR DIVERSION, AND THE SEIZURE OF THE SCHOOL WAS THE PRODUCT OF CAREFUL PLANNING AND BASED ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE SAFAD CAMPING TRIP. DESPITE TERRORISTS' SEIZURE OF NEARLY 100 HOSTAGES, THEY SHOWED THE TACTICAL SENSE TO CONFINE THEIR DEMAND TO ONLY 20 FEDAYEEN PRISONERS, FORCING ISRAEL TO ABANDON -- OSTENSIBLY AT LEAST -- ITS LONG-TIME POLICY OF REFUSING TO DEAL WITH FEDAYEEN. SUCCESSFUL EXCHANGE OF HOSTAGES WOULD HAVE BEEN A MAJOR COUP IN THE CONTINUING BATTLE FOR LEADERSHIP OF THE FEDAYEEN MOVEMENT, BUT EVEN THE ABORTIVE OPERATION WILL ELICIT ADMIRATION FROM MANY ARAB CIRCLES.

4. EVIDENCE THAT PERPETRATORS WERE SEEKING BROAD
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APPEAL INCLUDES: A) REPORTED INCLUSION, AMONG THE TERRORISTS TO BE RELEASED BY ISRAEL, OF PFLP-ASSOCIATE KOZO OKAMOTO AND TWO ISRAELIS ARRESTED FOR SPYING FOR SYRIA IN 1972; B) CITATION OF KAMAL NASIR, WHO WAS A PLO INDEPENDENT APPARENTLY UNAFFILIATED WITH ANY OF THE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS.

5. MORE DATA IS REQUIRED TO EXPLAIN CONTRADICTION

BETWEEN APPARENT PDF DIRECTION OF MA'ALOT OPERATION AND OUR PREVIOUS UNDERSTANDING THAT PDF WAS SOLIDLY ALIGNED WITH ARAFAT IN SEEKING A PALESTINIAN STATE WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS. FATAH COMPLICITY IN MA'ALOT CANNOT BE EXCLUDED.

6. IN FIXING RESPONSIBILITY FOR MA'ALOT, ISRAEL MAY INDICT SYRIA PERIPHERALLY ON GROUNDS THAT PDF COMMUNIQUE WERE DISTRIBUTED IN DAMASCUS. HOWEVER, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THESE COMMUNIQUE WERE CARRIED BY OFFICIAL SYRIAN MEDIA. IN VIEW OF ISRAEL CONTENTION THAT TERRORIST TEAM CAME FROM LEBANON, ASSUME ANY REPRISAL ACTION WOULD BE DIRECTED AGAINST TARGETS IN LEBANON. RUSH

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